

URBAN MOBILITY FOR ALL - INSTITUTIONAL ISSUES

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ABSTRACT : Urban mobility in most cities of the developing world, as a rule, is bad. The reasons and the possible solutions are fairly well known. However, not much improvement is seen. Why is this so? Several reasons are given; but the main reason i.e. Institutional weakness often goes un-acknowledged. This paper discusses the present management of urban transport in Indian cities and recommends an institutional set up and the steps needed to make it effective.

RESUME : La mobilité urbaine dans la plupart des villes des pays en voie de développement est en général mauvaise. Les raisons et les solutions possibles en sont bien connues, et cependant on ne note pas beaucoup d'amélioration. Pourquoi cela ? Plusieurs raisons en sont données, mais la principale – les insuffisances institutionnelles – passe souvent inaperçue. Cet exposé discute la gestion actuelle du transport urbain dans les villes indiennes et recommande des réformes institutionnelles ainsi que les mesures nécessaires pour les rendre effectives.

SCOPE OF THE PAPER

Urban mobility in the cities of the developing world is in bad shape and declining. Why is this so? Several reasons are given; but the main reason offered by most city administrators is; lack of financial resources to implement the desired programs and thereafter to provide subsidies to ensure their financial sustainability. Institutional weakness as a cause of the problem often goes un-acknowledged, perhaps because those currently responsible for providing good urban transport, both planners and managers, cannot be expected to accept their own failure. In a way, Institutional weakness perhaps is the major cause needing priority attention, because considerable improvement is possible without spending much.

COMPONENTS OF URBAN TRANSPORT

Urban transport demand in a city is determined amongst other factors by the prevailing land-use. The total demand is met by several modes of transport. These modes can be broadly divided into three groups i.e. Walk, Personalized transport and Public transport. Everybody needs to walk. Personalized transport includes bicycles, a non-

motorized transport, and 2-wheeler, car and its variants as the motorized transport. Public transport includes cycle rickshaw, a non-motorized mode, and bus, rail, para-transit [3-wheeler] and goods vehicles as the motorized modes.

The main infrastructure for most modes of transport is the road network (including surface quality) and associated facilities. This includes street furniture, intersections, traffic signals, roundabouts, grade-separators, bridges on rivers, drains and railway tracks, road bye-passes and bus terminals. Facilities also need to be provided for inter-modal transfer, parking of vehicles, pedestrians, bicycles and bus priority schemes. Water transit has its own dedicated waterway and terminals. Rail transit may have dedicated or may share the existing inter-city rail infrastructure or may share the road with other road-based modes besides rail bye-passes, and rail terminals.

In addition, other related activities need to be catered for. These include laying down policy, strategy and standards, traffic engineering and management, urban transport planning including planning of a multi-modal integrated transport system, education of road users, enforcement, training of drivers and

road users, removal of encroachments, licensing, vehicle inspection and testing facilities.

MANAGEMENT AT CITY STATE AND CENTER LEVEL

At the city level, several agencies are currently involved in the management of various components of urban transport outlined earlier. At the State level, UT is managed either by the Urban Development or by the Transport Ministry. At the Central Government level, Urban transport is being managed by three Ministries i.e. the Ministries of Urban affairs and employment, Railways and the Surface transport. Laying down standards and norms for items such as roads, is the function of some remote agencies such as the Indian Roads Congress and the central ministry of Surface transport.

MULTIPLICITY OF AGENCIES

Studies show that as many as 20 agencies may be involved in the management of a similar number of UT components in a city. For example, licensing of motorized vehicles, regulation of private bus services and para-transit is by the State Transport Authority and licensing of the non-motorized vehicles is by the Municipality. Bus transport services are provided by a dedicated State Road Transport Undertaking as a separate body or under the control of a city agency. Rail services, where available are provided by the Indian Railways under the Central Government. Traffic signals are managed and traffic rules are enforced by the Traffic police. The department of environment monitors the air quality. Land-use planning is by metropolitan development authorities.

In some cases even one component is managed by several different agencies. For example, Roads and the associated infrastructure, the main infrastructure for UT in a city, could be developed and maintained by at least 6 agencies, namely the city development authority, the municipality, State PWD, the Central PWD, the National Highways Authority and the Central Ministry of Surface Transport. Various Utility agencies in the city feel free to dig up these roads and leave them un-repaired or only badly repaired as often as they like.

CONSEQUENCES OF DIFFUSED RESPONSIBILITY

The result of the present institutional set up is that UT ends up as a secondary responsibility for several agencies. Each agency has its own primary role in

the scheme of things. For example, it is the primary responsibility of Municipalities to provide civic services, Police to maintain law and order, Transport department to issue licenses, Development authorities to plan for the growth of the city, Railways to take care of inter city traffic and so on. UT for these agencies is only a secondary function that they must carry. Various agencies involved in the management of urban transport, plan their activities independent of each other and also seek corresponding budgetary allocations directly. Thus funds currently being spent on UT are not necessarily used in an optimum way to yield maximum benefit. Besides, budgetary allocations have been unpredictable.

The state of affairs described in the foregoing paragraphs has led to several important consequences. The multi-agency responsibility works against the use of trained Urban transport planners and Traffic engineers because every agency may not have full time work for such professionals. The city thus has no trained professionals at all. As a result, transport planning, coordination amongst various agencies and traffic engineering and management suffer. Studies undertaken in cities have shown that rarely an intersection is correctly built. The urban transport infrastructure/assets have not been maintained and are declining. Urban transport services have failed to respond to the demand for expanded services to serve the growing low income peripheral areas of mega-cities or the improved quality of services to encourage users of personalized transport to shift to public transport. And lastly the cost of the services provided has been too high.

HISTORICAL REASONS FOR THE PRESENT INSTITUTIONAL WEAKNESS

The basic cause of the present state of affairs is the inherently weak municipality or the City Government. This is somewhat historical. The Indian constitution, till recently, had not assigned a definitive role to the third tier of Government i.e. the local Government. The municipality derived its functional and fiscal powers from state legislation. The state Government in its wisdom, continuously reduced the functional domain of the local bodies by establishing para-statal agencies. These agencies were deemed necessary as the local municipalities were perceived to lack the necessary capacity to carry out these tasks in a rapidly growing city and its periphery. Over and above, the State had superseded many local municipalities in the past and did not hold elections for many years.

The State Governments, in addition, eroded the financial base of the cities by abolishing many buoyant sources of revenue such as octroi and other tax sources like the professional tax and the entertainment tax. The City did not have sufficient financial capacity to provide the basic services and was forced to depend on financial transfers from the State government. The ad-hoc manner in which such financial transfers from the State government took place did not result in creating an adequate resource base for municipalities. As a result, the functional and financial powers of the local Government were severely eroded.

The 74th constitution amendment act of 1992 has now recognized the municipality as the third tier of the Government. The power of the state government to supersede the municipality has also been curtailed. The functional domain of the municipalities has been enlarged to include planning for economic development and social justice as its main functions. A rational procedure for transferring funds from the state to the city is to be devised. Constitution of a Metropolitan planning committee for inter-sectoral planning is also envisaged.

Despite the laudable objective of the constitutional amendment, the follow up action of the State to devolve power to the local Government has not been very encouraging. Little effort is made to enlarge the functional and financial domain of the municipalities. This is perhaps so because when the States themselves are clamoring for an increased degree of autonomy from the Center i.e. the National Government, it is difficult to expect them to shed their present powers and authority and transfer it to the local government. Nevertheless a framework now exists for the municipality to play an active role in discharging its responsibilities. The city by itself however cannot discharge this role without the support of the Center and the State Government. It is therefore important to define the role of the city, state and the center. The city undoubtedly has to carry primary responsibility with the center and the state helping with policy, financing and other related issues.

PROPOSAL FOR AN INSTITUTIONAL SET UP

PROPOSED ROLE OF THE CENTER

The Central Government should lay down National policy, enact laws, draft regulations, lay down planning standards and norms, prepare guidelines and manuals including those for private sector participation. It should design, install, maintain, and disseminate data- base, allot funds to States/Cities

on a pre-determined basis, promote research into UT including safety issues and organize human resource development.

The second important role for the Central Government is to help with the setting up of effective Institutional arrangement in the city, supported by a resource generation policy to finance urban transport projects, and an enabling legislation to be enacted by various State Governments. It should supplement the financial support provided by the States to the Cities to enable them to plan and coordinate the implementation of major infrastructure augmentation schemes including bus and rail transit.

PROPOSED ROLE OF THE STATE

The State Government should lay down policies, administer laws, rules and regulations, organize education and enforcement and allot funds to cities on a pre-determined basis. It should assist the cities with guidelines and manuals to plan and provide good urban mobility. The State Town Planning department, which is a well established department has no trained urban transport planners on their staff. This should be corrected so that the subject of UT gets due attention. It may not be correct to set up a separate UT department, because UT must be planned as an integral component of the rest of the urban infrastructure.

PROPOSED ROLE OF THE CITY

The center and the state cannot be directly responsible for urban mobility in each and every city. The primary responsibility for providing good urban mobility in a city has to lie with the City because most actions to improve urban mobility in the cities lie with the City and the city is the prime beneficiary. The city has to be made to realize this.

A three tier institutional set up is proposed for the city. The first tier should be responsible for inter-sectoral coordination because UT must be planned as an integral part of the city growth. The second tier should take care of the integrated planning of various components of UT and coordination amongst various agencies. The existing agencies will continue as the third tier of urban transport management for executing works as per the integrated program devised for improving urban mobility in the city.

The constitution of the 'Metropolitan planning committee' as envisaged in the 74th constitutional amendment for the metropolitan area will take care

of the inter-sectoral coordination and act as the first tier of management. At the second tier, dedicated attention to urban transport in respect of policy integration, comprehensive integrated transport planning, coordinated use of available funds, coordination of UT services and intra-sectoral coordination is essential. The responsibility may be entrusted to a central 'Transport Planning unit' and a 'Traffic engineering cell' in the municipality. These cells may grow into a separate authority in due course as the need is felt.

At the third tier, the distribution of responsibility for various components of UT amongst various agencies should be reviewed and any ambiguities removed. Traffic engineering and management is a very important tool in the hands of city managers to keep the city traffic moving at all times and needs to be practiced on an ongoing basis. This is a low cost measure, but has yet to get due attention.

ALLOCATION OF FUNDS AND MANAGEMENT

The authority for allocation and use of funds should rest with the UT planning agency. In other words, planning, decision-making and control of funds, all should rest with those directly responsible for producing results. The performance of this authority can be measured in terms of parameters such as the travel speed and the level of air pollution in the city. This agency should be so structured that continuity of policy and strategy to improve UT in the city is possible and maintained. The agency should give due weight to the political and bureaucratic views before coming to their decisions. The watchdog role on this authority can be played by a group of eminent citizens and not by any remote bureaucracy.

PRE-REQUISITES FOR EFFECTIVENESS OF THE AGENCY

DIFFICULTIES

The efforts to set up a 'Unified Metropolitan Transport Authority' [UMTA] for metropolitan cities have been going on for almost 30 years, but without success. The reason for this inaction is not far to seek. Urban transport affects almost all other city authorities and each agency reports to a separate ministry at the state and center level from whom it derives its power. Creation of the dedicated authority for UT will dilute the power base of each Ministry particularly if the proposed dedicated Authority has the powers to control all funds also. In addition Indian Railways that provides rail services in some cities cannot be placed under this dedicated

authority as the infrastructure is same both for urban and long distance services and its use cannot be subject to the decisions of the UMTA. Assuming the proposed institutional set up can be pushed through, for it to be effective, there are at least four main pre-requisites i.e. appropriate skills, regular source of funds, legislative support and quick decision-making.

SKILLS AND STAFF CADRE IN THE STATE

Planning, design and administrative skills in the city will require upgrading to enable the city to be effective in the discharge of its responsibility. For this, recruitment and retention of trained urban transport professionals in various cities is essential. This is possible only if the UT professionals get their due place in the scheme of things in the city and are offered reasonable career prospects. It is therefore necessary that each State creates a new State cadre of UT planners and engineers who should have access to the newly created senior level post at the Center and to similar posts to be created/identified at the State Head quarters.

FUNDING OF THE AUTHORITY

Finding the funds to finance the setting up of new agencies is not easy in developing economies. The requirement for funds can perhaps be minimized by transferring to the urban transport directorate, some existing posts from the Town planning or other State departments, which are supposed to be responsible for urban transport. This may be acceptable because overstaffing in Government is generally accepted, but politically it may not be easy. Otherwise funds may have to be allocated from the budget to create new posts. To begin a core group should be set up to assess the UT need on a State wide basis with a view to formulate the State policy and strategy to combat the growing problem of UT in the cities. It should also decide on the Institutional arrangement needed in each City as well as a policy for generation of funds. In addition 'Traffic engineering cells' should be set up in each city to effectively manage traffic movement in a city.

FUNDING OF UT SCHEMES

The funds requirement to implement the urban transport plan for the city can be divided into two parts i.e. that related to maintenance and optimum usage of the existing infrastructure and secondly for augmentation of infrastructure. The first requirement is decidedly far less compared to funds requirement

for augmentation of infrastructure. It is also necessary that the first requirement takes precedence over the second requirement so that the existing assets rather than being lost are put to best use.

The only source of funds today is the Government budgetary allocations both in the revenue and the capital accounts. This is primarily linked to the overall Government budgeting constraints and not to the needs of urban transport in a city and hence is not adequate. Good urban transport however benefits the city in general. The time spent in travel is saved. Fuel consumption, vehicle maintenance costs and pollutant emissions are reduced. The property prices rise, city efficiency and productivity improves. Therefore it is entirely justified to supplement resources from the city through dedicated levies and taxes on indirect beneficiaries and proceeds from commercial development of land.

PRIVATISATION

The requirement of funds to improve mobility in our cities is so large that Government allocations and other sources mentioned earlier alone cannot meet it. The involvement of the private sector in financing and managing urban transport services in the city is an option. This source can basically be used for services such as the bus and rail transit, that yield direct revenue that can be collected by the private entrepreneur to recover his investment with commercial profit. It must however be understood that rail transit as a rule is not commercially viable and hence will require a subsidy by the city. A private entrepreneur may succeed in reducing the need for government subsidy and hence his participation can be helpful. Experience with privatization of bus services is mixed, but it is established that bus services can be privatized at affordable fares and the need for capital and revenue financing by the city eliminated, but subject to adequate regulatory measures being in place. The question of involvement of the private sector is complex and skills and experience are scarce. This role must therefore continue to be played by the Center and the State.

LEGISLATION

Urban transport affects all aspects of City life and the working of nearly all other city agencies. It affects the safety of traveling public. Its fare structure has socio-economic implications. Its composition of modes affects the environment. Its economics depend on the effectiveness of multi-modal integration. UT plans have to be implemented

over a period of time and hence require continuity. To take care of these and several other aspects, the agency responsible for providing UT needs legislative support.

The existing laws have only an indirect relevance to UT in so far as the operation of suburban railway services, and plying of motor vehicles, private as well as those owned by Road Transport Companies and State Road Transport Corporations are concerned. None of these acts specifically deal with urban transport issues. Major provisions of the Hackney Carriage Act, the Tramways Act and the Motor Vehicles Act relate mainly to licensing, inspecting and regulating the operations of modes, along with grant of driving licenses and levy of fees, taxes and tolls (in case of the Tramways Act), and compensation for accidents etc. The Metro Railways Act was enacted as a supplement to the Indian Railways Act to facilitate construction of Calcutta Metro Railway.

To promote the development of an integrated urban transport system, to regulate urban transport services comprising of various modes and to enable inter and intra-sectoral coordination, it is important to consolidate the objectives, functions, process, procedures and other issues involved for provision of UT under one comprehensive statute. One possibility is a major revision of the Motor Vehicle Act so as to cover not only motor vehicles, but all vehicles used in urban areas. Also, the Railway Act may be modified to cover city rail transit systems and to incorporate the requirements for development of urban rail transit. Alternately and preferably, an Urban Transport Act needs to be drafted and enacted covering provisions in respect of,

- (a) construction, operation and maintenance of mass transport systems,
- (b) Safety in public transport and payment of compensation,
- (c) Bus operations,
- (d) Land acquisition/ reservation and payment of compensation for damage to structures during construction, and also development over and around stations, terminals etc., for purposes other than direct operation of the facility,
- (e) Traffic regulation in cities,
- (f) Financing, pricing and integrated fares,
- (g) Establishment of a Dedicated authority or any similar authority for planning, implementation, operation, multi-modal integration and coordination between city authorities and between different agencies.

Presently urban transport is not a clearly recognized constitutional function. Urban transport is an important city infrastructure as it affects the economic life of a city, requires large investments and involves shared responsibilities at all levels of governance. In order to make, the present implicit role and responsibilities of the Central and State Governments explicit and transparent, it is necessary to include 'Urban Transport' as an entity in the concurrent list of the Constitution.

DECISION MAKING

Government agencies in developing countries are not known for their efficiency. The main reasons for the present general administrative inaction in the cities is the general apathy prevailing in Government towards its job of providing good administration and secondly the very lengthy decision making process. This can be improved only in two ways; by bringing in accountability or through a strong consumer movement. Consumer movement is not in the nature of people in India and possibly in the nature of people of the region, but wherever such a movement has taken place, it has achieved results.

The proposal for assigning the responsibility to a city agency envisages accountability as well, for which decision making both laterally and vertically has to be improved. Decision making laterally in inter-sectoral groups is becoming increasingly difficult due to often conflicting objectives and possibly because the decision making process itself is becoming increasingly complex. Singapore has tried to overcome the problem by bringing these diverse groups under a unitary administrative control. Vertically the decisions get delayed due to Government bureaucracy that has no accountability. It does not delegate authority as it feels obliged to monitor the use of public money. Hence the provision for watch by a group of eminent citizens.

Thus urban transport institutions to be effective must be so structured that they have full technical and financial authority, the necessary legislative backing, technical skills and are duly supported by a resource generation policy, but are accountable. There is no room for any bureaucratic delays.

SUMMING UP

Urban transport in Indian cities is bad and deteriorating. The main reason is institutional weakness. Approximately 20 components of urban transport are presently managed by nearly as many agencies without any effective coordination. The

role of city, state and center needs to be defined with city carrying the prime responsibility.

A three tier institutional set up is proposed for metropolitan cities i.e. a Metropolitan planning committee for inter-sectoral coordination, a nominated agency for urban transport for intra-sectoral coordination of policy, planning and provision of services and thirdly the existing agencies that may continue in their present role of day to day management. The proposed dedicated authority has to be made effective by upgradation of its skills, a resource generation policy, comprehensive enabling legislation and full technical and financial powers for quick decision-making, but with full accountability. The work of this authority should be supervised by a non-political, non-bureaucratic committee of eminent citizens.